



**TOWN OF GROTON**  
Affordable Housing Trust



Becky Pine, *Chair*  
Carolyn Perkins, *Vice Chair*  
Phil Francisco, *Member*  
Richard Perini, *Member*

Regular Session Minutes

Date: Wednesday, March 2, 2022  
Time: 7:45 pm  
Location: Virtual meeting via Zoom  
Trust members in attendance: Carolyn Perkins, Becky Pine, Rick Perini, and Phil Francisco  
Others in attendance: John Sopka, Judy Anderson  
Referenced documents: Heritage Landing draft comment letter

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Becky Pine called the meeting to order at 7:49 pm. She stated that the meeting is being recorded and introduced members. Cameras for Trust members were turned on.

**Agenda Item:** Review draft regular session minutes from February 16, 2022.

*Carolyn Perkins moved to accept the February 16, 2022 regular session minutes as presented. Rick Perini seconded and the motion carried (4:0) by roll call vote of Francisco – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.*

**Agenda Item:** Review draft comment letter to MassHousing regarding proposed Heritage Landing 40B.

Carolyn Perkins asked for the phrase 'in perpetuity' to be added to the description of affordable housing. Phil Francisco asked that there be a mention of native plantings. The group decided that inserting a new sentence reading "We urge that native plants be used" would suffice.

*Rick Perini moved to approve the comments letter as edited to be sent to the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency. Phil Francisco seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Francisco – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.*

**Agenda Item:** Review draft comment letter to Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) regarding MBTA Housing Choice Zoning draft guidelines.

A draft letter was not prepared in advance of the meeting. Becky Pine said that the ideas to be expressed are complicated. Becky Pine shared her thoughts which she had written to help put her thoughts in order. She added that the Massachusetts Municipal Lawyers Association will be submitting comments later in March but will make those comments available to members in case municipalities would like to borrow their language. There will be time to wait for MMLA to produce their comments.

Becky Pine shared her thoughts which were expressed as follows:

One of the premises of this zoning is that more housing will bring down housing costs. (Slide 3, MRPC) I do not believe this will be the case in Groton. If we create a High Density MBTA Housing Choice District in Groton without requiring that a significant portion of the housing in the district be Affordable Housing under MA State Law definitions, we will merely be allowing a large amount of new high-end housing to be built. And we will fall further and further behind on meeting our Affordable Housing target number.

Urge Com of MA to consider an additional category of Adjacent Communities, for towns that have fewer than 15,000 population, no public transportation, limited municipal sewer and/or water infrastructure, and whose budgets and school buildings cannot absorb hundreds of new students.

Building 750 units of family housing would create a huge growth in our population.  
750 units X 3 or 4 people per unit = 2250 - 3000 additional people. Let's say 2600  
2600 new people is a 23% increase over our current population of 11,315

This growth of 2600 people would occur in addition to the 'regular' growth due to development that we have been experiencing.

Even if this growth is spread over 10 years, this growth would have a dramatic impact on the GDRSD schools, and on our ability to provide public safety services. And what about water and sewer for all of these housing units? If the developer has to pay for this, the price of the housing will be even higher. If the Town needs to provide it, our Tax bills will all rise.

Groton is currently 173 units short of meeting our Affordable Housing target. If we do not require that any of the 750 units be Affordable, we will be required to create another 75 (10% of the 750) Affordable Units.  
 $173 + 75 = \sim 250$  Affordable Units

If we somehow manage to build 250 Affordable Units, plus 750 new high-density units, that's 1000 new housing units. Or approx. 3500 more people in town.

Apparently, we are supposed to identify a 50-acre parcel that is known to be buildable. In Groton, we are blessed with numerous wetlands and we share this town with a number of identified endangered species. We have some ability to identify wetlands and the likelihood of endangered species on our town maps. But determining a parcel's specific legal development capacity requires spending money, sometimes quite a bit of money, for testing and analysis by experts.

Another limiting factor is soils that cannot support septic systems. Who will pay for the testing and other analyses that will be required to guarantee that land can be developed?

(Quite a few of Groton's wonderful undeveloped open spaces came into conservation because a developer learned, to his disappointment, that the parcel could not meet septic and/or other environmental requirements.)

Windfall profits for one or a few landowners whose land suddenly has the right to build far more density than the Town allows on other parcels. Unfair, and open to court challenge, because the Town has bestowed this on one person's land but not on another person's land right next to it.

Allowing this density without requiring that any of the units be Affordable will likely lead to even fewer Affordable Units being built anywhere, because developers will prefer this By-Right High-Density Zoning to the more restrictive 40-B Zoning. 40-B Zoning requires that 25% of the units be Affordable, and puts strict limits on the profits that the developer can make. The MBTA Housing Choice Zoning will allow the creation of many more units than normal zoning, with no requirement that any of them be Affordable, and with no constraints on the profit that can be made.

Once a town creates a By-Right High Density Zoning category in their bylaws, any property owner or developer will be free to bring a petition to Town Meeting to rezone their property into this category and will only need to convince a majority of the attendees to agree.

Becky Pine added that there are two audiences for the Trust's comments on the guidelines – the Planning Board and DHCD. She doesn't know where the Planning Board is going to come down on this issue and wonders whether 500 Main Street might still be included in the MBTA Communities zoning. John Sopka stated that Groton is notorious for having unperc-able soils. He thinks that the focus of the Trust should be on affordable housing and well above 25%, maybe 35 or 40%. John Sopka said that he agrees with the proposition that communities with Groton's profile should be held to different criteria. Fran Stanley said that an overlay is possible.

Carolyn Perkins said that the Planning Board is apt to post a public hearing on their original proposal. Fran Stanley will ask about any immediate plans for such a Planning Board public hearing.

Phil Francisco reminded the group of Fran Stanley's idea for a two step or scaled affordable housing requirement. He asked what the penalty would be for opting out. Becky Pine replied that MassWorks is the most significant funding. The Town secured a MassWorks grant to build the Four Corners sewer in the past. Presently, the Town is trying to get a new MassWorks grant for work on the Nod Road pumping station for the Town Center sewer.

Phil Francisco predicted that a lot of adjacent communities will struggle with this and that there are 75 adjacent communities. Becky Pine said that the Town does not have to build all of the units out to the full 750. Rather the Town just has to have its zoning allow for the possibility of this buildout through zoning. She said that because Groton is a desirable place to live, she is concerned that if you zone it, then there is a likelihood of buildout. She thinks that it would be shortsighted of the town to put this zoning into place.

The group discussed the citizens petition for changing the definition of elderly subsidized housing. The requested change may remove the affordable component. Phil Francisco attended the Planning Board meeting on February 24, 2022 where this item was discussed. In that meeting, Takashi Tada, Land Use Director and assistant to the Planning Board, noted that the proponent had submitted a draft of the proposed language. However, the citizen's petition had not been filed at that time and so it was not known what the actual language will be. Planning Board members reserved comment. Carolyn Perkins commented that there are ambiguities and conflicts in the Town's bylaw definition and so some update may be needed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:43 pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday March 23, 2022 at 7 pm (virtual meeting)

Notes by Fran Stanley